

Vietnam

To the Editor:

Kevin Buckley's review of my book, "The Last Day," (May 16) should not go unanswered because it is not, in fact, a review. It is a corruption which, at best, makes a fool of Mr. Buckley and, at worst, shows how some Vietnam reporters were part of the wider corruption of the war itself. I am not primarily concerned with Mr. Buckley's views of what is essentially a piece of reportage. He was not in Saigon on the two days about which I write; from the security of his School of Public Communication, he was not able to experience the "cheap emotion," as he puts it, of those worrying and sad days.

What I am concerned about is the lies he tells about my book. He "cites" four errors as the basis of his comments. He says that I have written that the O.S.S. began supporting Ho Chi Minh against the Japanese in 1955. 1955! Poor Mr. Buckley. The Japanese were defeated in 1945 and this is the date, and the only date, to be found in my reference to the O.S.S. on page 82. My second "error" is to have written that Graham Martin was named ambassador to South Vietnam in the last days of the Nixon Presidency. Graham Martin was appointed in 1973 and took up his post, as I have mentioned on page 19, in "Watergate infested days"—with a brief from the desperate Nixon to keep the war going. My third "error" is to have written that at least 50,000 district and village chiefs were murdered during the years of the C.I.A.'s Phoenix Program. Poor Mr. Buckley. He now has the distinction of joining that almost extinct species of old Vietnam sweat who believed what "American intelligence sources" told them—that the murderers of Phoenix were part of the regular war effort. I suggest he consult the files of The New York Times

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or even his own magazine, Newsweek. He might also put a call through to old contacts in the C.I.A.; the Agency long ago gave up concealment of the real aims of Phoenix.

Yes, "Whiskey Joe," as Mr. Buckley points out, was a radio call sign and not a code-name for rockets. It is a mistake and, I believe, a minuscule one. But the lies around which Mr. Buckley weaves his snide dismissal of my book—my "gloating" at the war's end, for example — say much about the kind of reporter he is and was in Vietnam. It was, perhaps about everything else, media lies, and cowardice, that did so much to shore up those who prolonged the suffering in Vietnam. Out of the ashes, the absent Mr. Buckley now makes his last, little stand.

JOHN PILGER
London

Kevin Buckley replies:

Pilger's error about "Whiskey Joe," amazing as it was, might have been a trifle had it been isolated. The same could be said for all the other errors, misconceptions and irrelevancies which crowd his book and his letter.

The reference to the O.S.S. on page 82 is as follows: "It is also almost twenty years to the day since the United States Office of Strategic Services, the forerunner to the CIA, began parachuting men into Vietnam to help an obscure resistance leader called Ho Chi Minh in his fight against the Japanese." Contrary to the assertion in his letter, there is no reference to a date and the O.S.S. on page 82 except the above. Twenty years from 1975 sounds like 1955 to me.

President Nixon appointed Graham Martin as ambassador on June 24, 1973, well before "the last, Watergate-infested days of the Nixon Presidency."

In regard to Phoenix, the point is that district and village chiefs were not the exclusive targets of the program as Pilger

claims. More of those officials actively collaborated in the administration of the assassination program. The truth about Phoenix is indeed in the files of The New York Times, of Newsweek, my former employer and of other publications. The victims of Phoenix were all kinds of Vietnamese—students, old men and women, soldiers, farmers, destitute refugees—just about anyone the Phoenix authorities could get their hands on. A denunciation of the Phoenix program is certainly in order. But a wildly erroneous description such as Pilger's only serves to shore up the arguments of officials who ran the program and who claim that the press wrote lies about them.